

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8378

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 BUENOS AIRES 7478

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, ASEC, MPOL, AR

SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF SECURITY SITUATION IN ARGENTINA

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE HAS ANALYZED CURRENT STRENGTH, OBJECTIVES AND CAPABILITIES OF CLANDESTINE "PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY ARMY" (ERP) AND OF "MONTONEROS". ERP FOUND DEVOTING ITS MAIN ATTENTION TO ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES WHILE MONTONEROS SEEM ENGAGED IN KIDNAPPING AND ASSAULTS TO OBTAIN FUNDS AND SUPPLIES. WHILE LEVEL OF TERRORISM HAS INCREASED IN RECENT MONTHS, TARGETS ARE CAREFULLY SELECTED. THE EMERGENCE OF THE "ARGENTINE ANTI-COMMUNIST ALLIANCE" (AAA), AS A SILENT ARM OF THE GOVERNMENT HAS RESULTED IN A SERIES OF ASSASSINATIONS OF KNOWN LEFTISTS. AS TERROR AND COUNTERTERROR INCREASE, LESS ATTENTION MAY BE PAID TO SECONDARY TARGETS, SUCH AS THE US EMBASSY. THE SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE CONCLUDED THAT WHILE THE GENERAL LEVEL OF SECURITY THREAT TO USG PERSONNEL HAS NOT CHANGED SINCE APRIL 15, 1974, RECENT DISCLOSURES OF CIA INVOLVEMENT IN CHILE, AND INTERNAL EVENTS SINCE THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT PERON, HAVE INCREASED THE THREAT LEVEL FOR US PERSONNEL ENGAGED IN INTELLIGENCE, THE MILITARY, DEA, FBI, AND LABOR ATTACHE, AND MISSION SECURITY. END SUMMARY.

2. EMBASSY SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE HAS COMPLETED REVIEW OF SECURITY SITUATION IN ARGENTINA S IF MAY AFFECT USG PERSONNEL. REVIEW COVERS PERIOD FROM APRIL 15, 1974 TO OCTOBER 1, 1974.

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3. TEXT OF SECURITY WATCH COMMITTEE'S ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION
QUOTED IN FULL BELOW.

4. QUOTE: BACKGROUND: 1. WHILE EXACT FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE, THE STRENGTH OF THE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY ARMY (ERP) IS ESTIMATED TO BE IN THE RANGE OF 600 TO 800 MILITANT ACTIVISTS WHO ARE BASICALLY WELL TRAINED AND TO A VARYING DEGREE, EXPERIENCED IN GUERRILLA WARFARE. THESE ARE IDEOLOGICALLY HIGHLY MOTIVATED AND DEVOTED INDIVIDUALS WHO GENERALLY STEM FROM THE LOWER MIDDLE AND MIDDLE CLASS PROFESSIONAL LEVEL OF ARGENTINE SOCIETY. THEY CLAIM TO BE "MARXISTS" AND THEY FIRMLY BELIEVE IN AND ACTIVELY PURSUE THE OVERTHROW OF ESTABLISHED GOVERNMENT VIA VIOLENT REVOLUTION AND IN QUEST OF A SOCIALIST FORM OF GOVERNMENT. THE ERP IS IN GOOD SHAPE FINANCIALLY, HAVING CARRIED OUT A STEADY SERIES OF KIDNAPPINGS OVER THE PAST 4 MONTHS. THE ERP LEADERSHIP CONSIDERS ITSELF "NATIONALISTIC AND SELF-SUFFICIENT" AND THEREFORE CURRENTLY HAS LIMITED INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS. ERP ACTIVITIES OVER THE PAST 4 MONTHS INDICATED 3 AREAS IN WHICH IT HAS DECIDED TO CONCENTRATE ITS ACTIVITY:

A. EMPHASIS (BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY) ON RURAL RATHER THAN URBAN WARFARE. THE ERP WHICH IS SENSITIVE TO ITS LACK OF "WORKER SUPPORT" HAS SOUGHT OUT AREAS WHERE LABOR UNREST IS PREVALENT (FOTIA/SUGAR WORKERS IN TUCUMAN; SMATA/AUTOMOTIVE WORKERS IN CORDOBA; VARIOUS SMALLER LABOR DISPUTES (BAGLEY IN BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE, ETC.) THE ERP LEADERSHIP HAS GEARED ITS ACTIVITY TO THESE AREAS IN QUEST OF LABOR SUPPORT AND TO RECRUIT CONSCRIPTS FOR ACTIVITIES IN TUCUMAN AND OTHER RURAL AREAS.

B. OPEN AND DIRECT CONFRONTATION WITH THE ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES. THE ERP FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT THE ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES MUST AND "CAN BE DEFEATED" VIA SUDDEN, LIGHTNING ATTACKS AS WITNESSED BY THE VILLA MARIA AND CATAMARACA ATTACKS. THE ERP HAS CONCENTRATED MUCH OF ITS "PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE" ON THE ARGENTINE CONSCRIPT AND AT THE SAME TIME HAS SUCCESSFULLY INFILTRATED ITS MEMBERS INTO THE ARMED FORCES AS REGULAR CONSCRIPTS. THE RECENT "REVENGE ASSASSINATIONS" IN RETALIATION FOR ERP MEMBERS KILLED IN THE CATAMARCA ATTACK ARE ALSO DESIGNED TO SEW UNREST AND DISCORD WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES. THE ERP BE-

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LIEVES THAT CONTINUED DIRECT ATTACKS WILL PROVIDE THE ARMED FORCES INTO CREATING A "DICTATORSHIP" THEREBY OPENING THE MASSES OF THE ARGENTINE PEOPLE TO SUPPORT OF THE ERP.

C. GENERAL SUPPORT OPERATIONS WHICH ARE DESIGNED TO MAINTAIN A STEADY IN-FLOW OF MONEY, WEAPONS, MUNITIONS, MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND THE RECRUITMENT OF KEY PENETRATIONS OF GOVERNMENTAL AND MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS.

2. THE MONTONEROS, EVEN PRIOR TO THE RETURN TO ARGENTINA OF JUAN DOMING PERON, WERE LOCKED IN A STRUGGLE WITH THE HARD-CORE "ORTHODOX" WING OF PERONISM. THIS STRUGGLE HAS CONTINUED AND TWO MONTHS AFTER THE DEATH OF PERON, IT REACHED THE DEFINITIVE STAGE WHEN THE MONTONEROS DECLARED THEMSELVES "CLANDESTINE" AND PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED THEIR INTENTION OF RETURNING TO ARMED HOSTILITY TO THE GOVERNMENT. THE MONTONERO LEADERSHIP BELIEVED IT HAD NO ALTERNATIVE SINCE THE POST-PERON LEADERSHIP DOMINATED BY ORTHODOX PERONISTS REFUSED TO MAINTAIN ANY DIALOGUE. THE MONTONEROS ALSO BECAME CONVINCED THAT THE ORTHODOX WING WAS DETERMINED TO ELIMINATE THEM, HENCE, THEY WENT INTO CLANDESTINITY WAS BASICALLY DEFENSIVE AND WAS IN THEIR VIEW THEIR SOLE MEANS OF SURVIVAL. THE FACTUAL STRENGTH OF THE MONTONEROS IS NOT KNOWN AT THIS TIME (IT IS HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT THE MONTONERO LEADERSHIP ITSELF CANNOT DEFINE ITS STRENGTH AT THE PRESENT MOMENT). THE ORGANIZATION IS IN A STATE OF FLUX AND IS BUSILY ATTEMPTING TO REORGANIZE. IT IS FACED WITH SERIOUS, INTERNAL IDEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS. IT DOES, NEVERTHELESS, HAVE A WELL TRAINED, EXPERIENCED, HARD-CORE MILITANCY, WHICH WE WOULD ESTIMATE AT WELL OVER 2,000. AS IN THE CASE OF THE RP THESE ARE DEVOTED, INTELLIGENT "IDEALISTS" WHO STEM FROM THE MIDDLE CLASS. THEY ARE WELL EDUCATED INDIVIDUALS FROM PROFESSIONAL RANKS. THEY ARE FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT THEY REPRESENT THE "SALVATION" OF AN ARGENTINA WHICH IS CURRENTLY BEING GOVERNED BY THIEVES AND THOSE "DEVOTED TO IMPERIALISM". THEY ALSO BELIEVE THAT WITH PROPER CONDUCT OF THEIR OPERATIONS, THEY CAN PROVIDE THEIR POINT AND CAN WIN OVER THE MASS OF THE ARGENTINE PEOPLE. THE MONTONEROS ARE BUSILY REORGANIZING AND IT IS TOO EARLY TO REALISTICALLY ESTIMATE WHAT THEIR TACTICS WILL BE IN THE COMING MONTHS; HOWEVER WE BELIEVE THAT THEY WILL CONCENTRATE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

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A. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO CARRY OUT KIDNAPPINGS AND TEMPORARY TAKE-OVERS OF PUBLIC INSTALLATIONS SINCE THEY ARE IN NEED OF FUNDS AND SUPPLIES. THEY WILL ORGANIZE NEW COLUMNS AND WILL CARRY OUT "SPECTACULAR OPERATIONS" DESIGNED TO EMBARRASS THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT.

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B. IN PRE-PERON ARGENTINA THE MONTONEROS HAD AN INTRICATE AND WELL-ESTABLISHED PENETRATION NET OF MOST OF THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS. THE MONTONEROS WILL CONCENTRATE ON REVIVING THESE NETS AND WILL WORK VERY HARD AT SUCCESSFUL PENETRATIONS OF ARGENTINE SECURITY ORGANIZATIONS.

C. "IDEOLOGICAL" DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ERP AND MONTONEROS WILL PERSIST. HOWEVER, OPERATIONS WHILE CARRIED OUT IN THE NAME OF ONE ORGANIZATION OR THE OTHER, WILL IN FACT BE COORDINATED AND EACH ORGANIZATION WILL SUPPORT THE OTHER.

3. SINCE THE DEATH OF JUAN DOMINGO PERON, THE LEADERSHIP OF THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN DRASTIC MEASURES TO COMBAT TERRORISM. IT HAS NEVERTHELESS BEEN AWARE OF TWO PITFALLS WHICH IT IS DETERMINED TO AVOID: OVER-REACTION TO THE POINT WHERE THE ARGENTINE PEOPLE AS A WHOLE WILL WAIVER IN SUPPORT OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND SECONDLY, PERMITTING THE ARGENTINE ARMED FORCES FROM ASSUMING A POSITION OF COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE SECURITY APPARATUS WHICH COULD EVENTUALLY LEAD TO AN OVERTHROW OF THE PRESENT LEADERSHIP. THE CURRENT LEADERSHIP IS VERY WELL AWARE OF THE TERRORIST THREAT AND IT HAS UNDERTAKEN THE FOLLOWING STEPS IN THE PAST TWO MONTHS:

A. IT HAS ORGANIZED A SECURITY COMMITTEE WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. THIS COMMITTEE IS CLANDESTINE AND IS CURRENTLY CHARGED WITH THE STUDY OF ALL EXISTING, INCOMING INTELLIGENCE ON TERRORIST ACTIVITIES, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AGGRESSIVE AND EXECUTIVE ACTIONS (ON THE BASIS OF INTELLIGENCE COLLECTED) AND FOR

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PSYCHOLOGICAL ACTIONS. MILITARY AND SECURITY OFFICIALS ARE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE BUT IT IS SIGNIFICANTLY CONTROLLED BY MARIO SAVINO, THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE. WE BELIEVE THIS COMMITTEE TO BE THE SOURCE OF "RECOMENDATIONS FOR ASSASSINATIONS" (AMONG OTHERS

RODOLFO ORTEGA PENA, ALFREDO CURUCHET, ATILIO LOPEZ, JULI TROXLER AND SILVIO FRONDIZI). THE SO CALLED AAA (ALIANZA ANTICOMUNISTA ARGENTINA OR ALIANZA ANTI-IMPERIALIST ARGENTINA--BOTH NAMES ARE OFFICIALLY UTILIZED) IS THE ORGANIZATION, MADE UP OF FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL POLICE, SIDE WORKERS AND PRIVATE CITIZENS, WHICH CARRIES OUT ACTIONS ON THE BASIS OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SECURITY COMMITTEE AND WITH GOVERNMENT APPROVAL. THE INTENT OF THESE ASSASSINATIONS IS DESIGNED PRIMARILY TO CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE WHEREBY ONE WILL THINK TWICE BEFORE SUPPORTING AND PARTICIPATING IN ACTIVE "COMMUNIST" (READ LEFTIST) OPERATIONS. THE SECURITY COMMITTEE AND THE AAA REPRESENT THE GOVERNMENT'S SILENT ARM DIRECTED AT TERRORISM. ITS AIM HAS BEEN SO BROAD AS TO INCLUDE MANY WHO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH TERRORISM AND WHO REPRESENT THE "LEGAL OPPOSITION". WHILE WE MAY WELL QUESTION ITS SUCCESS, THE GOVERNMENT IS CONVINCED OF ITS NECESSITY. ITS ACTIONS WILL, IN OUR OPINION, INCREASE AS ERP AND MONTONERO OPERATIONS STEP UP.

B. THE NEW PENAL CODE WHICH WAS SIGNED ON 1 OCT 74 IS A VERY MEATY INSTRUMENT AND AFFORDS THE SECURITY FORCES OF THE ARGENTINE FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL POLICE WITH THE NECESSARY LEGAL BACKING WITH WHICH TO OPERATE. ARGENTINE SECURITY FORCES HAVE COMPLAINED PERSISTANTLY THAT THEY WERE HAMPERED BY "LEGAL RED-TAPE". THE NEW PENAL CODE FILLS THIS GAP.

C. IN CLOSING THE UNIVERSITY OF BUENOS AIRES, THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT TOOK A MAJOR STEP (IN THEIR EYES) TOWARD DRYING UP A REGULAR SOURCE OF RECRUIT FOR BOTH THE ERP AND THE MONTONEROS. IF AND WHEN THE UNIVERSITY REOPENS ONE CAN REST ASSURED, THE UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION WILL BE CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT.

D. THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT HAS EXERCISED CONSIDERABLE RESTRAINT IN DEALING WITH LABOR PROBLEMS BOTH IN CORDOBA (SMATA) AND TUCUMAN (FOTIA). WHILE SAVING FACE (I.E. REFUSING TO NEGOTIATE UNTIL WORKERS FIRST RETURN TO WORK), IT HAS IN ESSENCE GIVEN IN TO MANY OF THE LABOR DEMANDS. IT HAS DONE SO AGAINST SOUND ECONOMIC REASONING BUT WELL AWARE OF THE ACTIVITY OF THE ERP AND MONTONEROS IN THESE AREAS, (AND THE POTENTIAL DANGERS) HAS COMPROMISED ITS
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ECONOMIC STANDARS.

E. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CAMPAIGN WAGED BY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE PAST 2 MONTHS HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE. THE "NATIONALIZATION OF THE SERVICE STATIONS" HAS BEEN TRUMPETED AS A POSITIVE STEP WHILE THE MONTONEROS HAVE "DECLARED THEMSELVES ILLEGAL". THE GOVERNMENT IS WELL AWARE THAT IT WAS POPULARLY ELECTED AND IT WILL CONTINUE TO DRIVE THIS HOME WHILE ASKING "WHAT DO THE ERP AND MONTONEROS WANT?"

4. WITH THE ABOVE BACKGROUND IN MIND, OUR CURRENT EVALUATION OF THE SECURITY SITUATION IS AS FOLLOWS:

A. A SERIOUS AND DEEP ROOTED TERRORIST SITUATION EXISTS IN ARGENTINA TODAY. IT IS HOWEVER TERRORISM ON A SELECTIVE BASIS--I.E., THE EXTREMES (THE ULTRA LEFT AND ULTRA RIGHT) ARE LOCKED IN A BATTLE OF ASSASSINATIONS AND COUNTER-ASSASSINATIONS WITH THE VAST MAJORITY OF THE ARGENTINE POPULATION AS INDIGNANT SPECTATORS. MURDERS IN ANY COUNTRY ARE ALWAYS SENSATIONAL NEWS; ARGENTINA IS NO EXCEPTION BUT DAILY POLITICAL MURDERS TEND TO PAINT A PICTURE OF A COUNTRY BEGINNING A CIVIL WAR. WE DO NOT BELIEVE THIS TO BE THE CASE IN ARGENTINA TODAY AND WHILE ONE CANNOT DISCOUNT THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE SITUATION, LIFE IN ARGENTINA SHOULD NOT BE PAINTED IN TERMS OF "IT IS ANGEROUS TO WALD THE STREETS." TO SOME EXTENT IT IS, BUT NO MORE SO THAN TO WALD THE STREETS OF ANY MAJOR US CITY WITH A HIGH CRIME RATE.

B. BOTH THE ERP AND THE MONTONEROS HAVE WELL-ARMED, TRAINED, INTELLIGENT MEMBERS WHO ARE DEVOTED TO AND CAPABLE OF CARRYING OUT KIDNAPPINGS, VIOLENT ATTACKS AGAINST INSTALLATIONS (MILITARY AND CIVILIAN) AND ASSASSINATIONS. IF AN OPERATIONAL UNIT FROM EITHER ORGANIZATION IS SUCCESSFUL IN PLANING AND STAFFING AN OPERATION (WE ARE SPEAKING IN TERMS OF CASING, SURVEILLANCE, LOOK-OUTS, EQUIPMENT) AND ALSO COUNT ON THE SURPRISE ELEMENT, THEY CAN EFFECTIVELY CARRY OUT KIDNAPPINGS, ASSASSINATIONS AND ATTACKS AGAINST TARGETS OF THEIR CHOOSING.

C. ALTHOUGH WE DO NOT CURRENTLY HAVE ANY CONCRETE EVIDENCE TO INDICATE THAT UNITED STATES DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL AND INSTALLATIONS ARE TARGETS OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE TO SO INDICATE, AND IN PRUDENCE WE MUST ASSUME THAT WE ARE TARGETED. STARTING FROM THE PAST IMAGE OF THE
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UNITED STATES IN LATIN AMERICA AND WORKING UP TO THE RECENT AND CURRENT SPATE OF PUBLICITY GIVEN TO CIA INTERVENTION IN CHILEAN AFFAIRS, ONE CANNOT IGNORE THE REAL POSSIBILITY THAT THE ERP AND THE MONTONEROS WILL UNDERTAKE AN ACTIVE OPERATION AGAINST US PERSONNEL AND/OR INSTALLATIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE ERP AND MONTONEROS ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED AT THIS TIME IN LINKING THE US GOVERNMENT (READ US EMBASSY) AND THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT TOGETHER AS MUTUAL AND COOPERATING "OPPRESSORS".

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D. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ARGENTINE ANTI-TERRORIST ACTIONS IS DEFINITELY ON THE UP-SWING. WHILE THE ERP AND THE MONTONEROS HAVE NOT YET BEEN PLACED ON THE DEFENSIVE, THEY ARE OBVIOUSLY FEELING GOVERNMENT PRESSURE, AND THIS IS LIKELY TO INCREASE OVER THE SHORT TERM. AS THE TERROR AND COUNTER TERROR CYCLE INCREASES, THE ARGENTINE TERRORISTS WILL PROBABLY BECOME MORE CONCERNED WITH THEIR PRIMARY ENEMY, I.E., THE ARGENTINE ARMY AND OTHER SECURITY FORCES, AND PAY LESS ATTENTION TO "SECONDARY" TARGETS, SUCH AS US EMBASSY PERSONNEL. NONETHELESS, THE POSSIBILITY THAT US PERSONNEL WILL BE CAUGHT UP IN RETALIATORY VIOLENCE, EITHER IN THE FORM OF AN ABDUCTION FOR PRISONER EXCHANGE OR AS PUNISHMENT FOR ALLEGED US ASSISTANCE TO ARGENTINE REPRESSIVE FORCES, CANNOT BE DISCOUNTED. IN FACT, AS ARGENTINE SECURITY FORCES STEP UP THEIR ACTIONS AND ARRESTS, THE EVER PRESENT (AND HISTORICALLY SUCCESSFUL) IDEA OF "EXCHANGE" OF DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL FOR ARRESTED TERRORISTS IS A REAL POSSIBILITY.

5. CONCLUSION: A. BASED ON THE ABOVE ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION IN ARGENTINA, IT IS CONCLUDED THAT THE GENERAL LEVEL OF SECURITY THREAT TO US GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES HAS NOT CHANGED BETWEEN APRIL

15, 1974 AND OCTOBER 1, 1974. THE AMBASSADOR REMAINS, AS BEFORE, THE PRINCIPAL TARGET, FOLLOWED BY THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION.

B. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF RECENT DISCLOSURES OF CIA INVOLVEMENT IN CHILE, AND INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS IN ARGENTINA SINCE THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT JUAN D. PERON, ON JULY 1, 1974, IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE SECURITY THREAT HAS INCREASED FOR PERSONNEL
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IN THE FOLLOWING FIELDS: 1) INTELLIGENCE; 2) MILITARY (ATTACHES AND MILGROUP); 3) DEA, LEGATT, LABATT; 4) SECURITY.

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